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TAGS: PREL NATO MOPS MARR AF

SUBJECT: SPAIN RAISES OEF-ISAF COORDINATION WITH ANTO  
PERMREPS

Classified By: Ambassador Victoria Nuland, for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (S) Spanish PermRep Benavides, on instructions, raised with PermReps coordination between Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) in connection with recent military operations in western Afghanistan. Emphasizing the impact that collateral damage has on public opinion, he urged that OEF be mindful that its operations have a political impact, including consequences for ISAF, and to abide by the principles of necessity, proportionality and discrimination. In response, U.S. and UK PermReps agreed that public handling and coordination could always be improved, but underscored firmly the importance of both OEF and ISAF operations, and this mutual support to each other. While civilian casualties and damages are always regrettable, we have to remind our publics that it is the Taliban who consciously put civilians at risk. Nuland further noted that ISAF air support had been essential in Shindand to assist U.S. forces who had been involved in a 14-hour firefight. She reminded colleagues of the hundreds of close air support (CAS) missions OEF has flown in support of ISAF. Privately, Benavides (protect) made clear that his demarche was impelled by PM Zapatero's personal concern about civilian casualties after seeing negative press reporting. It was a reminder of the fragility of public opinion in some key Allied capitals and the need to strengthen our quick-reaction messaging.

¶2. (S) At a PermReps' lunch on May 9, Spanish PermRep Benavides read out the text at para 3 on instructions -- unusual at lunch, but the venue was chosen to soft pedal the content and avoid press leaks. By prior agreement, the U.S. and UK responded as noted above.

¶3. (S) Begin Spanish text:

-- The clashes in the Zerkoh Valley of the province of Herat, and the ensuing collateral damages, already impact our main asset: the support of our public opinions, of our Parliaments, and the understanding of the Afghan people of our mission and our actions.

-- Concerning the incidents themselves, without prejudice to the ongoing investigations - which should be fast, candid and detailed - Some facts deserve a closer look, in order to draw lessons which should be already learnt.

-- Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) must be conscious of the political impact of its operational and tactical decisions, which have always, direct consequences on ISAF. Synergy should work both ways. ISAF can support OEF, but OEF must also support ISAF's political objectives. Political support and control not only binds ISAF. The principle of "Necessity" of the Law of War should always be applied on the ground. All possible efforts to maintain the principles of "Proportionality" in the use of force (causing the minimum harm to attain military objectives); and of "Discrimination", (between civilians and OMF) are an inevitable requirement.

-- ISAF has decided to associate "Necessity" to the operational term "in extremis support to OEF" (OPLAN). Is there a decision on articulating the scope of this term? Is there a clear picture of the "synergy" so many times discussed? How is coordination on the field? It has been decided to support synergy by respecting the different mandates and tasks and by talking fluently to each other, taking full advantage of the "double hat".

-- Proportionality must reign not only in the response, but also in the conception and conduction of the initial stages of operations. Special Operation Forces have basic combat power, and rely on very detailed planning and intelligence. Is this being done? Are "in extremis" situations being forced, because intelligence is not shared?

-- There is consensus on the idea that "a military alone solution is no solution" and that we need a "comprehensive approach".

-- Public Diplomacy: again, it must be pro-active and coordinated. It is to be welcomed that after debate in the NAC, people on the ground are making an effort to explain what happened. OEF must also bear the burden of "Public Diplomacy" and speak, especially when it has required our "in extremis" support.

-- Ownership? Karzai has shown his disgust at "foreign forces", in general, and has avoided the main issue: his responsibility for the slow pace of a real "Afghanization" of Afghanistan. This is the main issue, the "cross cutting" theme: an effective "ownership" in security (six years since 2001), which fails to come.

-- We cannot step into the trap of the different forces in this scenario. ISAF's or OEF's rhythm of operations must be self imposed, not set by the insurgents. For the sake of relatively minor tactical victories, the advantage of initiative cannot be endangered, by losing the freedom of action, national public opinion support and that of the Afghans, grant.

End Spanish text.

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